DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 338 927 CE 059 753

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TITLE Working Out? A Study of the Work Experience Module in Secondary Schools in Lothian. SCRE Project Reports.
INSTITUTION Scottish Council for Research in Education.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-947833-53-6
PUB DATE Aug 91
NOTE 42p.
AVAILABLE FROM Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St. John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR, Scotland.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Databases; Employer Attitudes; Foreign Countries; Job Placement; *Outcomes of Education; *Program Attitudes; Program Effectiveness; Secondary Education; Student Attitudes; Student Employment; Teacher Attitudes; Vocational Education; *Work Experience Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Scotland (Lothian Region)

ABSTRACT

The work experience module used in secondary schools in Lothian, Scotland, was evaluated by soliciting the opinions of the teachers and career officers who organize it, the students who participate, and the employers who provide work experience placements. Data were gathered between October 1990 and March 1991 from 699 students in 38 schools, 151 of their teachers, and 18 career officers using a questionnaire and from 40 employers by telephone. Some of the findings are the following: (1) both teacher and pupil groups felt that the work experience outcome had helped pupils become more confident; (2) more than half the students thought the experience had made them want to work harder at school; (3) more effort should be given to matching students with placements in which they could do well; (4) more effort should be made in helping students develop realistic expectations about the work experience; and (5) teachers found the database used in the project useful for making placements, but felt they needed more training and did not rely on it for all placements. (Two appendixes describe research methodology and list the types of job placements.) (KC)

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Working Out?

a study of the Work Experience module in secondary schools in Lothian

Heather Malcolm
Margaret Johnstone

SCRE PROJECT REPORTS

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SCRE Project Report No 24

©The Scottish Council for Research in Education, August 1991

ISBN 0 947833 53 6

Report arising from the evaluation of TVEI Extension in Lothian Region (project ref. T200) funded by Lothian Region from September 1 1989 to June 30 1994

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Printed by the Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR

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1 Background, Aims and Method

Background

This report is one of a series of studies undertaken for Lothian Region by the Scottish Council for Research in Education, as part of the Council's evaluation of Lothian's TVEI Extension programme. Its focus is the work experience module, which, as an element of the Extension, is part of the entitlement of all fourth year pupils in the Region's secondary schools. It is based on the views of those most directly involved with the work experience module - that is, the teachers and careers officers who deliver and/or organise it, the pupils, and the employers who provide work experience places.

Aims

The aims of the study encompassed four broad areas of research. We wanted to find out about:

- ***the whole module***
  - what learning outcomes were intended
  - how the module was related to other school work, especially in social education
- ***the placement***
  - what people saw as advantages and disadvantages
  - what preparation and debriefing was given
  - what placements were offered to pupils
  - how appropriate the placements were to pupils' aspirations
  - how appropriate the placements were to local job opportunities
  - how far the placement was standard across schools

- ***background organisation and support***
  - how the work experience organisers/teachers saw the role of the Regional Database
  - what preparation employers made for pupils' arrival
  - what staff development opportunities were available for teachers involved in this work
- ***how work experience could be improved.***

Method

Data were gathered between October 1990 and March 1991. We began by interviewing a range of key individuals whose views helped us to draw up questionnaires for pupils and teachers/work experience organisers. We then contacted all Lothian's secondary and special schools, the Region's careers offices and, with the help of the Regional Database, a number of employers providing placements. Most of the schools were sent a pack of 25 pupil questionnaires and five teacher/organiser questionnaires. The careers officers were also sent the teacher/organiser questionnaires, but in order to ensure as high a response rate as possible, we interviewed employers by telephone. Response rates from schools from both teacher and pupil were good; few schools gave no returns and only a small percentage of the replies had to be set aside as incomplete or mismatched.

Pupil data come from two distinct sets, A and B. Set A constitutes 421 pupils, which is 60% of the total sample. These came from 17 schools which had begun the work experience module early in the school session. At the time data were gathered they had completed their work experience placements, and had either completed or were near to having completed the module overall. Set B constitutes 278 pupils and forms the remaining 40% of the overall sample. They come from 16 secondary schools and 5 special schools which began the work experience module later, so that when we began data-gathering many pupils were only part-way through the module. While most of the questions were the same for both sets, there were necessarily some differences. In most instances this report describes data gathered from the overall pupil sample of

699, but when questions applied to one set only, or where we found noticeable differences between the responses of the two sets, this is made clear. For those who are interested, further details of the methods used will be found in the Technical Appendix.

The data are presented and discussed in a series of brief chapters. Chapter 2 looks briefly at those who provided us with the information on which this report is based. Chapters 3-6 each cover one of the broad areas of research outlined below, while Chapter 7 raises some of the issues that seemed to us to be of particular interest.

We would like to take this opportunity of thanking all those who participated in this study, especially the teachers and careers officers who made time to administer and complete a questionnaire, and to add their further views with enthusiasm and humour. We would also like to thank Kay Young for her patience and skill in preparing the various drafts of this report.

2 Whose Views Are We Reporting?

As this report is based on the views of specific people in schools, in the careers service and in the workplace, it seemed important that before we described the data further we look more closely at these information providers. What do we know about them?

Work experience organisers/teachers and careers officers

- There were 151 replies from schools and 18 from careers officers
- 53% were from women, 47% from men
- Over half the school-based respondents were PTs guidance or APTs guidance
- Most shared teaching on the module
- 42% organised the work experience placements
- For most (57%), involvement in the work experience module was a responsibility of their job or they had been asked to take this on (34%)
- Over half had received training in how to use the Database.

The pupils

- 699 pupils replied
- 48% were girls, 52% were boys
- They came from 33 secondary schools and 5 special schools
- More than half wanted to stay at school beyond the end of S4
- 86% looked beyond 'just getting a job'
- 75% had had a Saturday job or similar employment
- 72% had ideas about what work they wanted to do
- 71% felt it was important that their work experience placement matched this kind of work.

The employers

- 40 different firms were contacted
- Businesses ranged from small firms (eg a hairdresser) to large multiple chains (eg Asda) to multinational firms (eg Hewlett-Packard)
- Businesses varied in type from service to manufacturing companies
- Two-third of the firms had become involved through contact made by a careers officer; only a small number had been contacted by a school directly
- The motives given for participation in the scheme were twofold: it might encourage pupils' interest in that job, and work experience would broaden pupils' education
- Employers looked for cooperative pupils who might be interested in the work, but otherwise had few preconditions
- They had no preference for particular schools, other than a few firms which sought children living locally
- All save one firm had already had their placement pupil(s) when we contacted them.

Each of our groups of respondents comprised people who were currently involved with the module and/or the placement. We know that most of the teachers/organisers saw their involvement as an integral part of their particular job, that most pupils appeared to have given thought to their future employment and most employers did not want to impose preconditions about which pupils they took. Was there similar consensus on other issues? In the next section, we look at the views of the different groups on the first of our four research areas: the work experience module.

3 Aims and Gains

To reach any assessment of the extent to which the work experience module appeared to be successful, we first needed to know what had been intended, and then to set those intentions against views of what had been achieved. What did pupils think they were gaining from the module – what were its benefits? It is with these issues that this section is concerned.

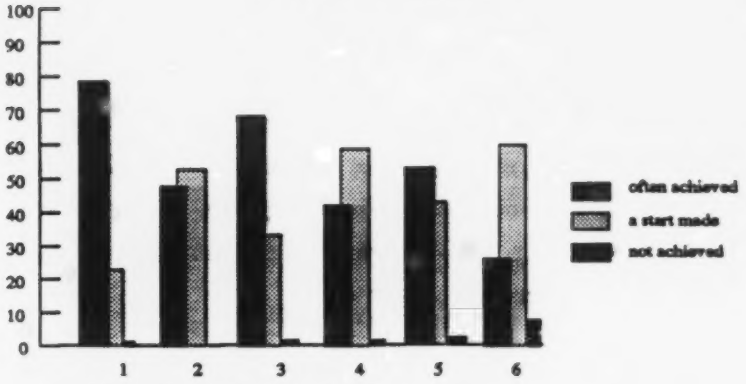
Aims and achievements

SCOTVEC's descriptor for the work experience module stresses the importance of qualities such as the ability to plan and organise work, make decisions and work with other people. In the preliminary interviews, we found that most repondents agreed with the importance of these, emphasising that they wanted to develop pupils' confidence and personal and social skills, and raise their awareness of the value such skills would have in the working world. One Principal Teacher of Guidance, for example, told us she was trying to ensure pupils learned that 'time keeping, responsibility for themselves, and being able to get on with others, listening and watching are all aspects which count in life.' Another commented that she was trying to give pupils 'the experience of applying for a job, writing a letter, attending an interview and then going through the process of working in a place for a week and being responsible for their arrival each day, on time.'

From the module descriptor and data from the preliminary interviews we drew up a list of possible aims for the module, and in the questionnaire asked teachers, work experience organisers and careers officers how far they thought they were achieving each one. We also asked them to rank the aims in terms of importance.

Figure 3.1 below depicts their responses, aim 1 being thought the most important and aim 6 the least important.

Figure 3.1: The extent to which work experience module aims were thought to be achieved



1 making pupils more confident (n=155)
2 helping pupils think realistically about a career (n=155)
3 teaching pupils how to go about getting a job (n=153)
4 improving pupils' decision-making skills (n=147)
5 improving pupils' basic social skills (n=141)
6 making pupils more aware of job opportunities in Lothian (n=143)
7 encouraging pupils to take further qualifications (n=116)

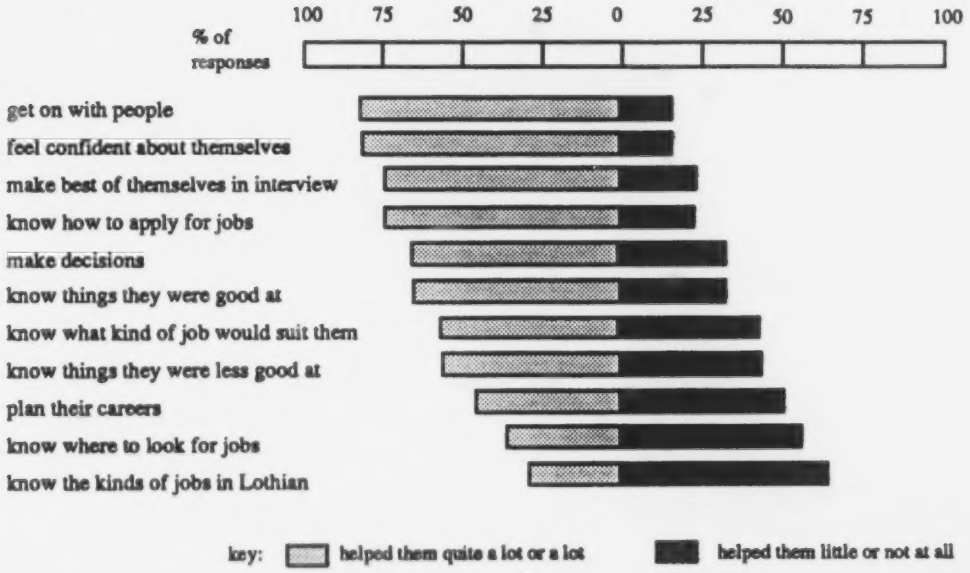
Respondents clearly put a high priority on helping pupils be more confident, and saw themselves as often successful in this. Helping pupils think realistically about a career was also felt to be important, and although half of those responding saw themselves as having made no more than 'a start', 45% claimed to achieve this aim often. As the table shows, most respondents saw themselves as having achieved less in making pupils aware of the job opportunities in Lothian. School-based teachers and work experience organisers ranked this aim relatively low in importance, and careers officers too thought that building pupils' confidence was more important than helping pupils get jobs or raising their awareness of local job opportunities. For all respondents, confidence-building was a high priority.

What did pupils gain from the module?

The perceptions of those delivering the work experience module, then, were that most were often achieving success in helping pupils be more confident, and making them familiar with the procedures involved in getting a job. What did pupils think they had gained from the module? We put this question to pupils in set

A, listing 11 learning outcomes which had been suggested in the preliminary interviews. Their responses suggest that, broadly, they agreed with the teachers' views, and are shown in Figure 3.2 below.

Figure 3.2: What did pupils gain from the module?


100 75 50 25 0 25 50 75 100
% of responses
get on with people
feel confident about themselves
make best of themselves in interview
know how to apply for jobs
make decisions
know things they were good at
know what kind of job would suit them
know things they were less good at
plan their careers
know where to look for jobs
know the kinds of jobs in Lothian
key: helped them quite a lot or a lot
helped them little or not at all

As the figure shows, high percentages felt the module was equipping them to set about getting a job, largely through personal development. Fewer pupils, however, seem to have felt the module had helped them understand the nature of job opportunities in Lothian, or plan their careers.

Although we had not been able to ask pupil set B what they had gained from the module, with so much of it ahead of them, we were interested to know what they thought would be helpful in getting a job, so that we could compare what they saw as important to the aims that teachers/organisers and the rest of the pupil sample thought were being achieved. Almost all this group thought it was important to:

- have qualifications 97%
- be interested in the work 97
- have a good reference from the school 96
- to be able to get on with people 94
- know how to behave in interviews 94
- be neat and tidy 93
- show they were confident 90
- know how to fill in an application form 88

These views strongly suggest that teachers, careers officers and work experience organisers are pursuing aims which their pupils agree are worthwhile and that the 'messages' of the module are being received.

Getting on with people, feeling confident about themselves, being able to make the best of themselves in interviews, knowing how to apply for jobs – these were the 'top four' benefits, which 75% of pupils or more claimed they derived from the work experience module as a whole. However, a crucially important component of the module is, of course, the work experience placement. What did this contribute to pupils' development? It is to this that we now turn.

4 On Placement - the World of Work

In the foregoing chapter we looked at the aims towards which teachers, organisers and careers officers were working, how far they felt these were being achieved and what pupils who had completed or nearly completed the module felt they had gained from it. We now narrow the focus to look at the placement itself. What advantages were claimed for it, and were there perceived to be disadvantages? What expectations did pupils have of the placement, and how far were these fulfilled? How did teachers prepare pupils for their placements, and what kinds of discussions took place once pupils had returned to school? How were pupils and placements brought together? We begin with the first of these questions.

What were the positive effects of the placement?

Discussion with teachers in the preliminary interviews revealed a firm belief that being out on placement increased pupil confidence and maturity, and gave pupils the chance to develop personal skills, fostered by the module, in a work environment. All but one of those who were based in schools (six of the seven we interviewed) suggested this, making comments such as these:

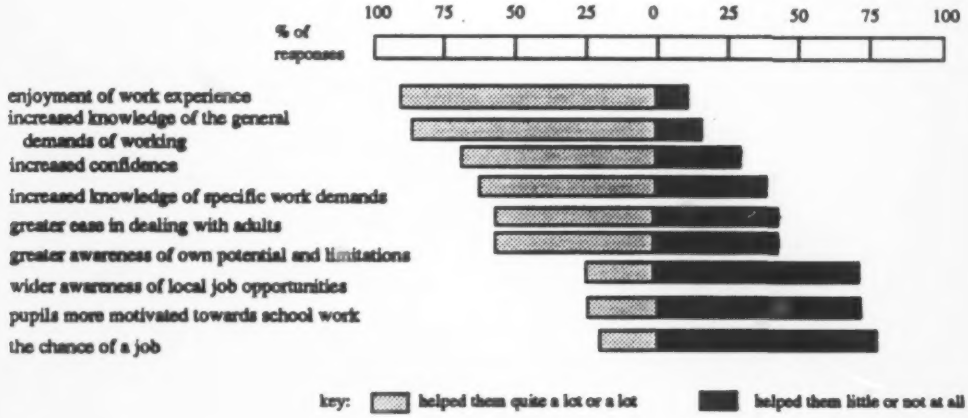
> Each pupil does get something out of it, even if it is getting up and catching a bus every morning, or making a telephone call to the placement. It is amazing how much even the most confident of pupils can get nervous about making phone calls or going out on the placement.

> When they came back from work experience most of them were more enthusiastic and motivated ... They are much more interested in things generally, and a lot of them seemed to do a lot of growing up in that week.

Two people mentioned that occasionally pupils were offered part-time jobs after their placement.

We tested these claims with the larger population of teachers, work experience organisers and careers officers who responded to our questionnaire. We found that being on placement was widely thought to result in pupils' having an increased knowledge of the general and specific demands of working, increased confidence, greater self-awareness and greater ease in working with adults. Figure 4.1 illustrates this.

Figure 4.1: Positive effects of the work placement on pupils - teachers' views


100 75 50 25 0 25 50 75 100
% of responses
enjoyment of work experience
increased knowledge of the general demands of working
increased confidence
increased knowledge of specific work demands
greater ease in dealing with adults
greater awareness of own potential and limitations
wider awareness of local job opportunities
pupils more motivated towards school work
the chance of a job
key: helped them quite a lot or a lot
helped them little or not at all

47% of respondents also added, in an open question, that a major advantage for the pupils was that the placement gave a realistic introduction to work.

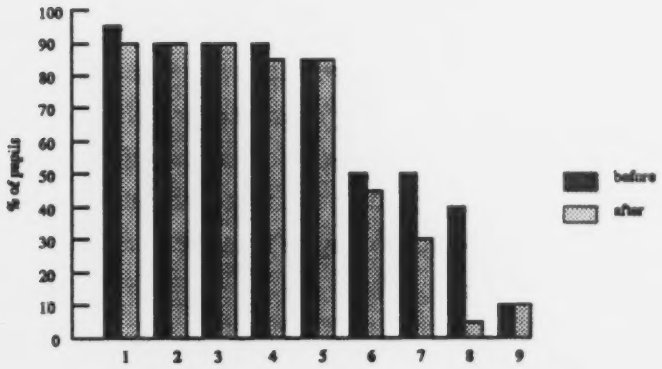
Telephone interviews revealed that employers saw three chief advantages in taking part in the work experience scheme. Most frequently mentioned was that participation gave them an opportunity to explore the labour market: 18 of those interviewed (45%) pointed this out. Twenty percent saw it as generally useful to young people, and felt that they themselves gained a moral satisfaction from helping to make the experience possible, while for 15% of employers it was an indirect public relations exercise.

Pupils' views of the placement

What were pupils' views of their placement? Data from the preliminary interviews had suggested a number of likely pupil expectations. Pupils in set B were asked, both before they went out of school and on their return, to tell us whether they agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to these. Figure 4.2 shows the results.

Figure 4.2: Pupils' expectations of their placements, and how far these were fulfilled

(n = 278)



1 'I think I'll enjoy it' / 'I enjoyed it'
2 'It will give me an idea of what working life is like' / 'It gave me an idea of what working life is like'
3 'I think it will make me more confident' / 'It made me feel more confident'
4 'It will give me a better idea of what I can do' / 'It gave me a better idea of what I can do'
5 'It will give me a better idea of whether or not I want to do this job' / 'It gave me an idea of whether or not I want to do that job'
6 'It's a chance to get away from school' / 'It was a chance to get away from school'
7 'I'm worried I will do something wrong' / 'I felt I made mistakes'
8 'I'm worried about getting on with people' / 'I felt I didn't get on with people at work'
9 'It's a waste of time' / 'It was a waste of time'

As the figure illustrates, the great majority of pupils felt that the more positive of their expections - enjoyment, a taste of the 'world of work' and growth in confidence - had been fulfilled. Worries about doing something wrong and getting on with people at the workplace often proved groundless. There seems, however, to have been a small percentage which was determined to view the placement as a 'waste of time'.

Because the placement was a more distant experience for pupils in set A, our data on their views is less specific. To a large extent, however, the perceptions of this group mirrored those of the other pupils. 88% agreed that the placement had given them an idea of what working life was like and whether they wanted to do that job. 82% claimed it had helped them feel more confident about tackling new tasks, and 80% about working with adults. 77% said it had lived up to their expectations, and that given the choice of remaining at school or going out on placement again they would choose the latter.

There was an intriguing difference, however, in the extent to which pupils in the two data sets felt the placement had motivated them to work harder at school: sixty three percent of the pupils who completed the before/after set of questionnaires claimed this effect, compared to only 47% of those who were more distant from the experience. Do we deduce from this that an initial resolution to work harder at school wore off again for some of the pupils?

Some pupils added written comments to their questionnaire replies, most of which revealed satisfaction with the placement, and sometimes surprise. The following are typical:

> It was better than I expected it to be. Before I went, I thought that I would get all of the boring jobs, but I was surprised to find that I was given many important jobs. They kept no secrets from me.
>
> I did not think I would be treated as much like an employee as I was.
>
> I think the work experience has been a good chance to get out and be in the community and talk to people.
>
> I was surprised at how well integrated the placement made me feel. I did not do so much monotonous filing like I thought I would.

Views like these present a very positive picture of the placement. Were no disadvantages identified?

Disadvantages of the placement

Few of those we had interviewed in the preliminary stages of the study identified disadvantages in the work experience placement. 'If a child fails, I suppose it's a disadvantage,' said one Guidance teacher, adding that if the experience was disappointing the pupil could be put off 'real work'. Another wondered if pupils might think jobs were easy to get because getting the placement had not seemed difficult. However, the percentages of questionnaire respondents who agreed with either of these were very small: 3% and 4% respectively.

An interesting feature of the data concerning disadvantages is that none of those who identified them appeared to feel they were great enough to warrant the removal of the placement from the curriculum; respondents tended to add that disadvantages were compensated for by the benefits of the scheme for the pupils. In fact, twenty-nine percent of the teachers/organisers cited no disadvantages of any kind. However, 30% of questionnaire respondents thought subject teachers in their schools saw the placements as eroding subject time, and responding to an open question about its disadvantages, no fewer than 47% thought other staff saw the placement as a disruption to the timetable. The same open question further revealed that 15% thought the placement increased the workload for those involved and 9% that a work experience placement was not appropriate for some pupils.

Twenty-three of the employers reported disadvantages for the companies in the scheme, such as staff time being taken up, and pupils slowing things down. These were not necessarily severe problems. 'It's a slight inconvenience really,' said one, 'but there is a lot of administration involved, and supervisor time.' Seven commented that pupils were not always interested, which tended to make things more difficult. As one employer commented,

> Ideally there are no disadvantages. But we have had uninterested young people, who are a problem in terms of relations with staff and the public. We don't expect them to necessarily aid our commercial activity, but if they can't smile they are a problem.

Another pointed out that unrealistic expectations could lead to problems:

> Most of [the pupils] came with a false expection that they would be cutting hair, doing hairdressing. They weren't prepared to do tidying up, *et cetera*, and so they were difficult. Some were rude to us and to the public, and some left before the end of the week. I had to be on their backs all the time, trying to encourage them. It was too difficult and demanding, and spoiled the good team that we have here.

Such experiences seemed to be rare, however. For most employers, disadvantages were not great enough to discourage future participation in the scheme. We were interested that only two firms (out of 40) had dropped out. Their reasons for this had to do with their experience of 'undependable' or 'disruptive' pupils, and not because their representatives felt the work placement scheme as such had general disadvantages.

Ten percent of pupils took the opportunity of an open question to tell us what disadvantages they saw in the placement. Some of these were inconveniences, like having to get two buses to get there. The most common 'disadvantage' was disappointment that the job had not lived up to what had been expected. Eight pupils felt that the placement timing had caused them extra work to catch up with exam preparation.

For all groups, then, perceptions of disadvantages were linked with a desire to minimise disruption, rather than a view that the fundamental principle of including a work experience placement in the curriculum was flawed. Advantages were felt to outweigh disadvantages. Employers' views, however, suggest it is important

that schools do all they can to help pupils be realistic about their placements, and ensure they take them seriously. Were issues such as these covered in module time leading up to the placement?

School-based preparation and debriefing

In all cases, preparation for placement included giving immediately practical information such as contact names, advice about how to dress for the placement, how to get there and discussion of the sorts of tasks pupils would be expected to do. Preparing pupils for their placements was, however, more complex than this, as was the process of extracting value from the experience afterwards. The table below shows what topics over 50% of questionnaire respondents claimed to cover in placement and de-briefing sessions.

Placement preparation		Placement de-briefing	
pupils assess their strengths and skills	(98%)	pupils write about their placement experience	(92%)
how to complete an application form	(90%)	class discussion of work experience generally	(91%)
discussion of possible problems	(89%)	pupils identify personal gains from work experience	(89%)
discussion of any work pupils have already done, such as Saturday jobs	(86%)	discussion of work experience with teacher, on a one-to-one basis	(79%)
pupils consider future work plans	(79%)	pupils consider future work plans	(78%)
discussion of what certificates pupils hope to gain at school	(68%)	pupils assess their strengths and skills	(74%)
mock interviews	(60%)	pupils given help to rectify weaknesses apparent during the placement	(73%)
		discussion of common features of working life	(61%)
		pupils given information about the job position in Lothian	(51%)

When we asked respondents to nominate the two topics most important to them, we found a commonality of agreement on only one: 42% thought it highly important to encourage pupils to assess their own strengths and skills. As the table shows, a large percentage of respondents covered this topic both before and after the placement. Clearly, they felt that getting pupils to look at themselves as individuals was an important part of work experience. We were interested to see that a high percentage of teachers also asked

pupils to view their future work plans afresh, once their placement was over.

Pupils confirmed that the preparation they had been given for the placement emphasised practicalities. They claimed that the most commonly given types of advice were about filling in the application form, who to contact when they arrived, the hours they would work and how to behave in placement interviews. Not surprisingly, large percentages of the pupils thought this type of information had been useful. They claimed that other types of advice, however, were given less frequently, although most of those who had received it felt that advice had been useful. For example:

- 63% had been given information about how to get help at work if necessary. 84% of these thought it had been useful, 16% not.
- 66% had been given some idea about the kinds of tasks they would be doing. 75% thought that was useful, 25% not.
- 50% had been given advice about how to fit into the routine at work. 76% of these thought that had been useful, 24% not.

There seemed to be some contradictions in the claims made by the teachers/organisers/careers officers and the pupils. For example, 86% of the former group claimed that the pupils were told the sorts of tasks they would do, but only 66% of pupils acknowledged it. This may be a failure of understanding on the pupils' part: teachers may have given broad information while pupils expected details. Interestingly, six employers (14%) told us they would have liked a clearer idea of what pupils were expected to learn, and felt that it would improve the placement if pupils arrived with more specific objectives. These perceptions suggest that the three groups had rather different expectations of the placement.

Placements and their appropriateness

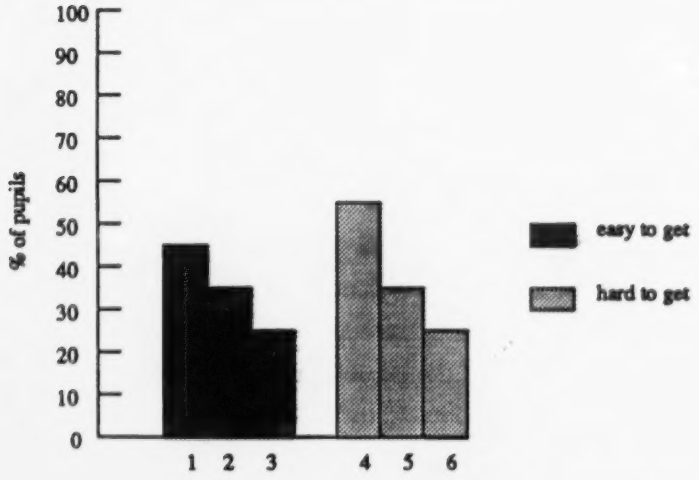
On what basis were pupils and placements matched? How far were attempts being made to fit placements to the overall picture of job

availability in Lothian, or to pupils' aspirations? Within the constraints of what was available, 27% of respondents told us they gave pupils a free choice of placements. 50%, however, tried to match pupils to jobs they wanted to do, 11% to jobs they were sure the pupils could do, and 2% on the basis of the structure of job opportunities in Lothian (10% gave no response).

Most pupils, however, felt that they had chosen placements themselves, 65% claiming that no-one had helped them. Those pupils who did acknowledge help named a range of people, most often 'my social education teacher', 'my family' and 'another teacher'. Five percent of the pupils named 'the careers officer'. The perception that nobody helped 65% of the pupils to choose their work experience placements seems somewhat surprising, but we wonder whether pupils do not recognise help unless it is pointedly given. It may be that they fail to see broad and general assistance, such as advice to the class or preparatory aspects of the module, as being in that category.

The fact that only 2% of respondents claimed they tried to match pupils to placements on the basis of Lothian's structure of job opportunity suggests that finding suitable placements may be a difficult enough task without the added constraint of trying to reflect local job structures. Despite this, however, how far were pupils aware of the local job opportunities in existence? To address this issue, we attached to the questionnaire a list of 11 work types already familiar to pupils from their school work (see Appendix B). We then asked them to choose three which they thought would be easy to get locally, and three they thought would be hard to get. Figure 4.3 shows the results.

Figure 4.3: Types of work pupils thought would be hard and easy to get in Edinburgh or Lothian

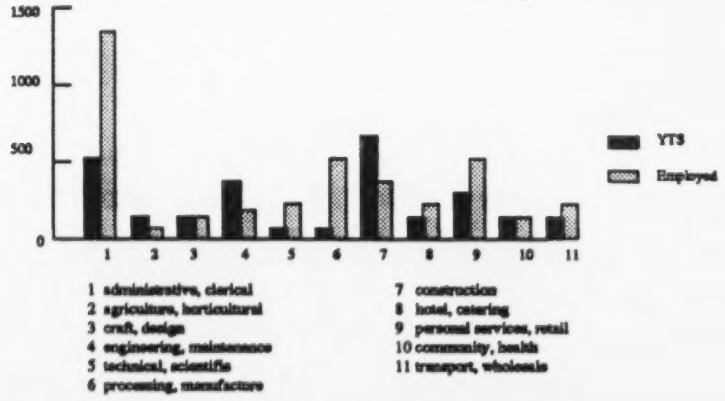


1 office work
2 factory work
3 services
4 technical and scientific
5 plants and animals
6 craft and design

School leaver 'first destination' analyses conducted by Lothian Region's Careers Service and reported in 'The First Destinations of School Leavers, Session 1988/89'*, demonstrate clearly that most pupils move into administrative and clerical work in almost all parts of the Region. In the Region overall, the second and third most common job destinations for school leavers in 1988/89 were in the areas of processing and manufacture and personal services. The overall analysis also shows that fewer pupils entered work in agriculture and horticulture than any other areas of employment, and indicates that work in craft and design is not easy to obtain. However, jobs in the technical and scientific area seem to have been easier to secure in 1988/9 than pupils believed - easier, for example, than those in engineering and maintenance or community and health work. Figure 4.4 below, derived from 'The First Destinations of School Leavers', illustrates the overall Regional picture.

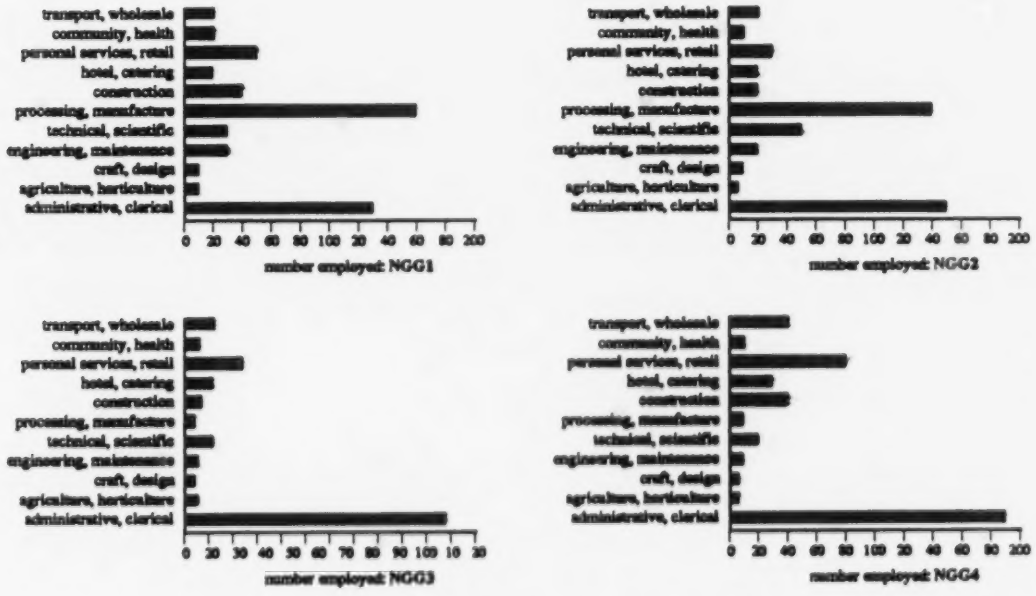
* 'The First Destinations of School Leavers, Session 1988/89', Lothian Region Careers Service, January 1990.
The Labour Market for School Leavers, Sectoral Analysis: administrative and clerical posts in the banking, insurance, finance and public services sector, Lothian Regional Council Department of Education, June 1990.

Figure 4.4: First Destination Analysis: the Regional picture overall



To the extent to which these overall destinations reflect the job market, pupils' perceptions of these types of work which are easy and difficult to get seem, on the whole, to be borne out. In practice, however, the picture is more complex. Posts in administrative and clerical work were most common within the city of Edinburgh. The likelihood of pupils moving into work in other sectors varies considerably from area to area, as Figure 4.5, again derived from 'The First Destination of School Leavers', illustrates.

Figure 4.5: First Destination Analyses for a selection of Neighbourhood Groups



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As the figure makes clear, in Neighbourhood Groups 1 and 2 large numbers of pupils entered manufacturing employment - 'factory work', but very few in Neighbourhood Group 4 and hardly any in Neighbourhood Group 3 entered this type of employment.

If it is the aim of work experience organisers, teachers and careers officers to alert pupils to opportunities within the Regional job structure, the data gathered for the current study suggest they may have achieved some success. If, on they other hand, they would like pupils to be more aware of the complexity of local variation, more work may need to be carried out. We should point out, however, that it is not possible to conclude from the available data how far the work experience module or placement rather than general knowledge or experience contributed to the views pupils held about this, as we found no noticeable differences between the perceptions of those who had and who had not completed the module.

For both the 'easy' and the 'hard-to-get' jobs, the pattern of pupil aspiration was the same. In each case, just half the pupils were not interested in jobs of this kind, and 23% were undecided. Instead, their responses gave the impression that they were willing to travel further afield in search of interesting employment: only 27% stated that they wanted to work near home, while the others claimed to be willing to travel for an hour or more to find suitable employment, some to move house or even go abroad. We suspect, however, that these affirmations may need to be interpreted with caution.

What did pupils think of the choice of placements offered? Most, 59%, felt there had been plenty of different jobs to choose from. Thirty-two percent would have welcomed a greater variety, and 9% felt there were not many jobs from which to choose.

As the data given in Chapter 2 indicate, pupils claimed to have fairly firm ideas about the work they wanted to do, and aspired to more than 'just getting a job': more than half wanted to stay at school beyond S4. We also know that 71% felt it was important

that their placement matched the work they wanted to do. These data suggest that pupils' expectations of the placement tended to be high - does that mean they were doomed to some degree of disappointment? Apparently not: the great majority of pupils (88%) were pleased with the placement they got.

Where there was disappointment, pupils had found their job either 'repetitive' or 'boring', or simply wrote 'I thought it would be different'. While there is always likely to be a group of pupils which will never be satisfied, it may just be worthwhile to ask whether some placements were in fact boring and repetitive, why, and whether there is anything to be done about it. However, we would point out that it may be a useful learning experience for pupils to realise that work is not always exciting. It might also be helpful to give further attention to ways in which the 'expectations gap' might be narrowed.

Responses from organisers/teachers and careers officers revealed a concern about a mis-match between pupils and job placements which suggests that many may already be considering issues of this kind. Although 58% felt the database always offered a reasonable choice of placement, 60% felt that there were not enough of the kinds of jobs they would like to see available for pupils with higher aspirations.

In summary, most of those who provided information viewed the placement positively. The outcomes of the placement cited by both teachers and pupils supported aims which the former had identified for the whole module. Pupils, teachers/organisers and employers alike emphasised the advantages of the placement, which included an increase in pupil confidence, good public relations for schools and employers and improved school-employer relations. Most pupils reported that they had been pleased with their choice of placement, but there is some evidence to suggest there may be scope for preparation to focus more specifically on pupils' expectations of these.

5 Background Organisation and Support

Running the work experience module is a complex task. All pupils have to find a placement, and teachers/organisers wish to ensure pupils have the placement of their choice. What employers offer has to be juggled with pupils' wishes and what is practicable, to give pupils the most useful placement possible, and the whole programme has to fit into the school timetable with the minimum of disruption. In this chapter we focus on three aspects of the background organisation which helps the programme run: the role of the Regional Database, the kind of preparation that employers and careers officers put into preparing placements, and the support teachers, work experience organisers and careers officers had received. We turn first to the role of the Regional Database.

The role of the Regional Database

Seven of those we interviewed as a preliminary to the study used the Regional database as a source for their pupils' placements, and of these, four praised it highly. 'We couldn't do it [the work experience module] without the database,' was one comment. A teacher in a special school had found it less appropriate to her pupils' needs, however, preferring to draw on her own contacts, built up over the years. The two others had reservations, one telling us that if for some reasons placements were booked as late as four weeks in advance, 'a lot of the plum placements have gone', while the other felt that the database offered 'a blanket sort of provision' which was less useful for 'brighter pupils'. Some of these found their own placements:

> They looked at the database placements and said 'There's nothing here for for me.' So I said to them, if that's the case, go away and see what you can do and come back when you've got something firm.

How far did the views of teachers and work experience organisers reflect these perceptions? We used the interview data to draw up a list of stances teachers and work experience organisers might take with regard to the database, and asked how strongly respondents agreed or disagreed.

The great majority, eighty-nine percent, told us the database was very useful. It was not, however, the sole source of placement supply: 85% of respondents told us pupils sometimes found their own placements, 55% that they contacted their own placement providers and 54% that parents sometimes helped. As we pointed out in the previous chapter, 60% felt that there were not enough of the kinds of jobs for pupils with higher aspirations.

The opportunity for open comment given on the final page of the questionnaire yielded hints of logistical problems. However, these tended to arise from a combination of circumstances rather than difficulties with the database itself:

> If you have a full teaching commitment, things like phone calls to and from employers can be quite difficult; also the booking of placements on the database can be very time-consuming when there is only one machine in the school which can be used.

Only 15% of respondents felt it was difficult to contact the database, however, and about half (49%) felt they had been adequately trained to use it. A few respondents noted, again through the 'back page' open comments, pupil disappointment if first choice of placement could not be met. They attributed this to employers withdrawing rather than to any inefficiency in the database, however, and the numbers making comments of this kind were very low.

A quarter of the company representatives we interviewed used the database as a means of alerting schools to any conditions that

might be attached to the placements they were offering. However, 10% were unsure of what the database did or could do. 'I've never heard of it,' said one.

Work-based organisation and planning

Our telephone interviews with employers made it clear that careers officers played a vital part in 'recruiting' placements and in initial planning. Over half the company representatives (58%) said they had been drawn into the scheme by a careers officer, and 50% told us they had spent time with a careers officer in planning the placement. Practicalities such as the hours pupils would work, health and safety issues and standards of dress and behaviour were covered, as well as discussion of the types of tasks pupils would do.

In addition, most company representatives (59%) also spent time either on their own or with someone else within the company planning the range of work pupils would do and identifying someone to act as supervisor. The task range varied from company to company: 27% said pupils would experience one basic type of work, but others built in greater variety. One, for example, told us:

> At present we have a standard programme, which involves time spent in several departments. We would like to develop that ... pupils are spoiled really, by seeing round several places in the firm!

Most of those we interviewed thought that the placement gave pupils a reasonable insight into the company's activities, which was important if pupils were to understand the world of work. 'A lot of people come to work in retail with no idea of what is involved,' said one. 'They think it is just standing at a till.' Another commented, 'It has to be a realistic experience or it would be pointless.' Nearly all those we spoke to (95%) had identified a supervisor whose role was to provide on-going assessment and feedback and deal with any problems pupils may have. The scheme also required that supervisors and pupils together would prepare a written report for the school. Most (83%) also told us they gave pupils their own, informal feedback session at the end

of the placement - sometimes with a reward! 'I give them something at the end of the week,' said one employer. 'Something from the shop.'

Overall, our impression was that employers took the placement seriously and were prepared to spend time and effort on it.

Staff training and development

We asked the teachers/organisers and careers officers what training they had been given to preparare them for involvement with the work experience module, and what training they would like to have. Their responses suggested that the experience of one of the people we interviewed at the beginning of the study had been typical: she had told us,

> I was left to my own devices really; we had a half-day tuition on the database and that was basically it. That is one thing we could do with, additional training on the database and how it works.

For the questionnaire respondents, the most common kind of preparation of which they had experienced involved discussion with others. Seventy-five percent claimed to have spent time in this way with teachers and 65% with careers service staff, and over 90% of those having such discussions had found them useful. Sixty-five percent had been trained to use the database, and most felt it had been helpful.

Of the 30% of respondents who took advantage of our invitation to comment on support they would have liked but did not get, the most frequently mentioned was time for 'general preparation and familiarisation with the course'. Nineteen people identified this. Nine wrote that they had no training in how to use the database.

In view of our understanding that Lothian Region offered such training to all secondary schools in the Region, the reasons why some interested staff appear to have missed that opportunity may be something which individual schools will wish to investigate.

6 How Could Work Experience Be Improved?

Data from preliminary interviews had suggested several improvements to the work experience module. These included a wider and more sophisticated range of work placements, longer placements, and more time for staff. One person felt the teachers' workload was such that they paid less attention to matching pupils to placements than they might, which sometimes led to complaints from employers:

> If Standard Life say they want someone of good smart appearance, who's trustworthy and has good communication skills, both verbal and written, that is what [Standard Life] wants ... In some cases the teacher is not looking at who has applied. They're just simply keying in the pupil's name and address and that's it.

This perception was borne out by 10% of the employers interviewed, who felt that schools took little notice of their pupil specifications. 'We were told at the start that if we gave the database information about the placements, they would match them to people who were interested in that work,' said one. 'That doesn't seem to happen now.'

Nine employers (22%) felt that schools could do more to prepare pupils for the placements through, for example, giving them specific objectives as was mentioned in chaper 4. 'At present the ball is left in our court', said one employer. And five of those we interviewed (12%) felt that if the schools gave them more information about individual pupils and about how well the placements had gone, they would be able to improve what they offered. Four (10%) thought placements should be longer. Overall, the main improvements employers suggested for the scheme

were:

- preparation should focus in more detail on specific placements
- placements should be matched to pupils' interests
- schools should give employers more information
- placements should be longer.

Questionnaire responses from teachers, organisers and careers officers confirmed the importance of a wider range of work placements and more time for teachers, although only 31% of respondents wanted longer placements. The changes they most frequently saw as necessary were:

- a wider choice of placements on the database (78%)
- more time to visit pupils on placement (73%)
- more time allocated to matching pupils and placements (67%)
- secretarial help with placement organisation (67%)
- time to contact providers personally (54%)
- more support to 'sell' work experience to other teachers (53%)

No single change was overwhelmingly seen as 'most important'. However, one in four teachers saw 'a wider choice of placements on the database' as most important, and one in five 'more time to visit pupils on placement'.

7 Conclusions

The foregoing data make it clear that, overall, the work experience module was well received by all who provided us with information. Few disadvantages were identified by any of the groups, and the view tended to be that, in any case, these were compensated for by the advantages. The overwhelming majority of teachers, work experience organisers and careers officers felt that the Regional database was useful, though they did not rely on it entirely to provide all the placements they needed to find.

Most frequent and important outcome

Both teacher and pupil groups felt that the work experience outcome most often achieved was helping pupils be more confident. This was also the most important of teachers' aspirations for the module. In general, pupils' personal and social development seems to have been a prominent feature of both the work experience module and placement. Judging from pupils' responses, it also seems to have been addressed with considerable success: high percentages identified gains in this area.

The structure of job opportunities in Lothian and careers planning

In contrast to their perceptions of achievement in building confidence and developing social skills, most teachers, work experience organisers and careers officers felt they had done no more than make a start in raising pupil awareness of the structure of job opportunities in Lothian. Pupils also took this view, though we found they had a broad understanding of what was likely to be available to them in the region overall. Teachers, work experience organisers and careers officers did not claim to give this issue highest priority. However, their aspirations were somewhat different with respect to helping pupils think realistically about a

career, or careers planning, which despite being the second most important of their aims was also an area where half felt they had made little headway. Pupil views suggest this feeling matched theirs.

The data make it clear that careers officers, like teachers and work experience organisers, tended to see the development of pupils' personal qualities as a more important aim for the work experience module than raising pupils' awareness of local job opportunities. However, if they would like to see greater stress put on the latter issue in schools, we wonder whether teachers could benefit from further understanding of the concept of 'local' in this context, and of the complexity of local job structures. If so, this is an area where further or more concentrated input from the careers service might be valuable. A number of teachers indicated that they would like more general preparation and familiarity with the work experience module: it may be that this is another area in which further support would be helpful.

We also wonder whether school-based teachers are finding it easier to develop the broad area of personal development, and focus on the specific area of preparing for a particular placement, than to work with pupils at thinking through their career possibilities. We know that most of our respondents had a guidance remit, and it would be reasonable to assume that personal and social development was an area in which they felt familiar. It is possible, however, that some may feel less comfortable with their ability to help pupils in careers planning, for which more specific knowledge than they possess may be required. A wider knowledge base which would help teachers concentrate more on this might also enable them to build more broadly on the placement. This could be particularly useful when work placements have to be scheduled early in the module, and could help combat a sense of anti-climax once pupils were back in school. No-one cited this as an area in which they would like further training, so we would not wish to make too much of the point, but offer it as a possible reason why half our respondents felt they had achieved relatively little in this area.

Motivation for pupils to work harder at school

The data reveal a difference in the percentages of pupils in our two data sets who claimed their placements had motivated them to work harder at school, and suggest that as time passes this motivating factor tends to fade. How can teachers capitalise on what appear to be good intentions at their strongest immediately after return from the placement? We feel that there are implications here, not only for work experience module teachers, but subject teachers too.

Matching pupils to work experience placements

The data also suggest there may be an argument for giving greater consideration to the process of matching pupils to placements, and vice versa. We know that over 77% of the teachers/work experience organisers/careers officers having this responsibility indicated that they matched pupils to placements either on the basis of jobs pupils wanted to do or gave pupils a free choice of placement. Why then did one in ten employers express irritation that schools had failed to send them interested pupils?

Viewing the question realistically, we know from our pupil data that a small percentage of pupils was determined to see the work experience placement as a 'waste of time', and it may be there is little to be done about that. However, it seems to us that the approaches to matching pupils and placements referred to above are likely to ensure that pupils are interested in their placements only so long as placements which fit pupils' wishes in this way are available. What happens when no interest is shown in any of the placements on offer? On what basis is pupil interest in placements founded? Is it always realistic? One of those we interviewed commented that unless early placement bookings were made, 'plum placements' were gone. What, we wonder, constitutes a 'plum placement'? Given that the supply of placements will always be limited, how far do those delivering the module stimulate pupil interest in other placements – for example, by showing them how the experience of working can be valuable whether it takes place in a small, relatively humble establishment or in a large and sophisticated one?

Many of the teachers/work experience organisers/careers officers responding to our questionnaire thought there were not enough placements available to suit 'brighter' pupils. We wonder, however, what kind of work experience placements these could be. Few employers are likely to entrust sensitive or highly skilled tasks to pupils, however intelligent or capable, and pupils spending a week in a professional atmosphere such as a doctor's surgery or a research establishment are more likely to shadow others at work than be given opportunities to do much themselves beyond the basic tasks that would be part of many placements. Perhaps 'brighter' pupils could be encouraged to think more deeply about ways of extracting value from whatever placements are on offer, rather than look for placements which appear to match their academic aspirations.

Closing the 'expectations gap'

A related point is that the data also have implications for the way pupils are prepared for placements, not only before they are selected but also once they have been chosen. The evidence of this study suggests that preparation focuses on practical and logistical issues (which are of course essential) and getting pupils to look at their own, personal qualities. How much attention, however, is given to the expectations pupils have of specific placements? To avoid disappointment and employer irritation, teachers may need to spend time, if necessary on a one-to-one basis with individuals, making it clearer to pupils what they can (and cannot) expect to do during specific placements, and what they are likely to gain from them. The fact that 22% of the employers we interviewed felt pupils needed more detailed preparation for the placement reinforces this. It may also be, however, that employers too need to be made more aware of its broader purpose. This may be the task of a careers officer or school-based teacher, but what seems to be important is that all parties concerned have a shared understanding.

Of the major improvements suggested by teachers/organisers and careers officers, most have to do with the ways in which individual schools handle the organisation and management of work experience. The other was the view that the Regional database

would benefit from being able to offer a wider choice of placements. At the time we began the study, the database had been in existence for less than two years, and was still building up its placements: those with responsibility for it were conscious that relatively little was available in the construction industry, scientific laboratories and some professional areas. A wider range of placements, however, need not necessarily result in a wider range of experience for pupils, and we return once again to our point about the need to close the expectations gap. Placements with lawyers, doctors and hairdressers do not mean pupils will defend clients in court, advise patients or cut hair. While this will be obvious to placement providers, careers officers and teachers, the data suggest it is not always self-evident to pupils. Do they realise they might have a more satisfying experience in a local shop, where they could get a chance to develop some management skills?

Appendix A Technical Appendix

This appendix describes in brief how the research was carried out and what methods of data collection were used. The study was commissioned by Lothian Region, to begin in October 1990 and finish in June 1991. During October and November, preliminary interviews were carried out with teachers, work experience organisers, careers officers and employers. These were the basis for the construction of questionnaires. Data collection from the full sample took place during the period January 1991 to March 1991. Analysis of this material occupied April-May 1991, and this Report was completed at the end of June, 1991.

The Sample: Pupils

It was agreed that all Lothian schools with pupils on work experience placement during the core period of the study, that is December 1990 to March 1991, would participate. This group of 38 secondary schools and 12 special schools formed the basis of the pupil sample. Within each of the secondary schools we sought a sample of approximately 25 pupils or one social education class. The choice of class was left to the person in school who organised the work experience. For the special schools we left the choice of pupils to the headteacher. Pupil returns varied therefore from school to school.

The pupils were divided into two groups: group A, who had completed the work experience placement by January 1991, and Group B, whose work experience placements were timed from February-March. Each group was given a different version of the questionnaire (see Methods). The return rate was good in each case:

- Group A (single form) – 421 pupils from 17 secondary schools
  (1 school too late; 1 school no reply)
- Group B (before/after form) – 278 pupils from 16 secondary schools and
  5 special schools
  (2 schools confused data; 8 schools no reply)

For both Group A and Group B, a few schools sent in the pupil returns or part of the pupil returns too late to be included in the analysis. In addition, there was a loss of pupils from Group B, who were given the paired questionnaire. Some schools 'lost' pupils who had completed the first questionnaire only and 'gained' other pupils who had completed the second questionnaire only. However, the total number of replies made a broad analysis of pupil views possible.

The Sample: Adults

The organisers/teachers involved came from *all* secondary schools in Lothian Region. There were 151 adult in-school responses. The careers service was contacted, and a further 18 replies from careers officers involved in the scheme were received. In all, this gave a total of 169 returns for the adult questionnaire.

The sample of employers was not devised to any specific pattern. The Regional Database provided a list of 60 firms representing the range of placements available. We were able to contact 40 firms from that list.

Methods

The size of the sample and the broad aim of the study, which was to look at how the work experience scheme was operating, dictated a questionnaire approach. We needed to reach as many people as possible to map out the general picture. To devise a questionnaire appropriate for this purpose, we needed to find out what people's concerns were. In a series of preliminary interviews we spoke to teachers, organisers, a representative of the database and to employers. This material was transcribed, and analysed to identify concerns and problems central to the work experience. On the basis of this we created a questionnaire for organisers/teachers and also a semi-structured telephone interview schedule for employers. We judged that employers would respond more readily to this approach than to a postal questionnaire.

The questionnaire for pupils was also based on the aims, concerns and problems identified by the adults, although a number of open questions were included to encourage pupils to express personal views. This questionnaire took two forms; this was because of the difficulties in reaching all the pupils prior to their work experience placement. Those pupils who had been out on placement in December 1990 and in January 1991 were asked to look back at their placement and reply retrospectively. Their questionnaire was the single form version. This was sent out to schools at the end of January 1991, which meant that some pupils were looking back about nine weeks, to early December 1990. Fortunately, the placement seemed to have made a strong impression on almost all of the pupils replying. Very few (4%) noted that they could not remember certain points such as what choice of placement had been available to them.

The other version of the pupil questionnaire, given to pupils going out on placement after January 1991, was administered in two parts, before and after the placement. The contents

were broadly similar to the content of the Group A questionnaire, indeed many of the questions were identical. The difference lay in the immediacy of the response possible from Group B, rather than the particular questions. We suspected that Group A pupils looking back might rationalise their choice of placement, or take a rosier view of the placement as it receded in time. Group B pupils who were about to go out on placement might give a more immediate list of worries or anticipatory problems. The latter was the case, in fact. However, in terms of overall comment and positive reaction *after* the placement, both sets of pupils gave very similar replies.

Analysis

The teacher/organiser and careers officer data set and the two pupil data sets from Group A and Group B were all analysed using SPSS. For all three sets of data, analysis was confined to straightforward frequencies and crosstabulation. Replies were indicative of attitudes and beliefs and were not hard edged arithmetical data. There are statistical techniques for handling non-parametric data, but we felt these to be inappropriate. Although the separate samples were of a reasonable size, the pupil samples particularly, we had no way of knowing how each school had undertaken the administration. Some of the returns had had to be discarded as flawed, others were incomplete or confused. We were happy to use the remaining data as broadly illustrative of how work experience operated.

Appendix B **Work Experience Placement – What Type of Job**

OFFICE WORK *code number:* **01**

(Examples : Clerical, Secretarial, Administration/management, Computer operation, Information services, Marketing)

PLANTS AND ANIMALS *code number:* **02**

(Examples : Animal care, Farming, Gardening/landscaping, Forestry)

CRAFT AND DESIGN *code number:* **03**

(Examples : Art and design, Creative crafts, Audio visual, Printing)

ENGINEERING AND GARAGE *code number:* **04**

(Examples : Vehicle trades, Engineering crafts, Engineering (Technical and prof.))

TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC *code number:* **05**

(Examples : Computer systems, Scientific (inc laboratory))

FACTORY WORK *code number:* **06**

(Examples : Assembly work, Clothing, Food processing, Other processing)

CONSTRUCTION *code number:* **07**

(Examples : Building operatives, Building crafts, Building (technical and prof.))

HOTEL AND CATERING *code number:* **08**

(Examples : Food preparation, Food service, Hotel work (non food))

PERSONAL SERVICE *code number:* **09**

(Examples : Sales, shop work, Entertainment/sport, Hairdressing)

COMMUNITY/HEALTH SERVICES *code number:* **10**

(Examples : Medical, Community work)

TRANSPORT AND WHOLESALE *code number:* **11**

(Examples : Delivery, Warehouse, Transport, Porters/janitors, Laundry work)